

Thailand Declares Martial Law
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BANGKOK, May 20 (Bernama) -- Thailand's army declared martial law across the country, effective immediately, early Tuesday morning.

The move was announced on army-run, TV5 channel at 3am, and was aimed at restoring peace and order in the country.

Army personnel were deployed at TV stations in Bangkok.

The martial law was announced amid preparation by the pro-government Red Shirt supporters and anti-government protesters to hold major rallies this week.

The Red Shirts are based at Aksa road in the suburb of Bangkok, while the anti-government protesters were in a few locations in Bangkok.

Following the declaration of the martial law, the anti-government group, People Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) cancelled its street rally scheduled Tuesday.

Under martial law, the protesters are only allowed to hold rallies at their current bases and cannot move around.

The Army declared the martial law after both sides of Thailand's political divide failed to agree on a solution to the the political conflict in the country.

One major stumbling block to a resolution of the conflict was the insistence by the anti-government groups that the current caretaker government, which is dominated by the ruling Pheu Thai Party, resigned and a neutral Prime Minister with full power be appointed.

However, the caretaker cabinet now headed by acting caretaker Prime Minister Niwattumrong Boonsongpaisan had refused to step down.

The conflict started with a protest over a proposed amnesty bill last year which was eventually scrapped after pressures from opposition groups which regarded it as a move to enable the return of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from exile and eventually reforms in the political system in the country.

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